

Haka: the cutting edge of sport

A throat-cutting gesture at the end of a fierce new All Black haka symbolises the cutting edge of sport and not the slaughter of opponents, says the haka's composer. The haka, unveiled before the Carisbrook test and in front of a stoic South African squad, set the scene for a dramatic 31-27 All Black victory.

Explaining the gesture, composer and haka expert Derek Lardelli said: "Playing rugby at this level, with this intensity, is the cutting edge of sport. The players are on the knife edge. They are gladiators in the arena. If they win they are heroes, if they lose they are taken apart."

Mr Lardelli urged understanding of the throat-cutting gesture - performed with particular feeling by halfback Piri Weepu. He said it was symbolic of the intensity of first-class rugby, and the consequences of defeat.

Saturday's performance of Kapa O Pango (Team in Black) was the culmination of more than a year's development, and it left the Ngati Porou man humbled and proud at the energy and passion displayed by the team. Mr Lardelli said calls by All Black captain Tana Umaga and senior players for something that better represented them had prompted the new haka, an alternative to the more traditional Kamate Kamate. "[They] wanted a haka that said who they were, where they are from, and to create a legacy they wanted to leave for future All Blacks."

Mr Lardelli said the haka was not composed as a replacement for Kamate Kamate, but as an alternative. "Haka is about harnessing the physical and mental power within yourself, and building unity. If it affects your opposition, then that is their choice."

Springbok captain John Smith said: "To stand there and watch it for the first time was a privilege."

Ngati Toa chairman Robert Solomon scoffed at claims that the change was driven by copyright claims from descendants of his tribe's ancestral chief Te Rauparaha. "The All Blacks have used our haka since I was a boy," he said. "If they perform a new one that is their choice. We are honoured they have used our taonga for so long."

"The new haka contributed to the game. It was brilliant."

FOCUS QUESTIONS:

1. Identify the language feature in the phrase 'the players are on the knife edge' and explain its effect. (line 6)
2. Explain the pun in the article's headline 'Haka: the cutting edge of sport' (you need to read and understand the article in order to do this)
3. Identify three adjectives used in the article and discuss the effect they have on the reader.
4. Find an example of sports jargon in this article and explain why it is used.